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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/27/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [SOCL](#) [ER](#)  
SUBJECT: ERITREAN MUSLIMS NOT EXEMPT FROM GSE ABUSE

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Mohammed Salih (protect), an Eritrean working as the information officer for a UN agency in Asmara, provided insight on the government's recent spate of Muslim arrests. According to Mohammed, the Eritrean government is using the threat of radical Islamism to justify a country-wide sweep and arrest of influential Muslims, though there is little evidence to suggest Eritrea's well-off Muslims are Islamist. However, there have been reports of an emerging group of Muslims who have broken away from the mainstream Muslim community and have been carrying out sectarian murders. The group may have been responsible for the recent shooting of a Christian taxi driver outside of Keren. Mohammed said he did not know if the group was Islamist in nature, but the government is taking advantage of the apparent threat to crack down on the community, arrest affluent Muslims, and confiscate their assets. He said more than 60 Muslims had been arrested in Asmara over the past month. He believed the July 2008 death of Mohammed Saleh Hagos, the former owner of the Omo Soap Factory, who died under mysterious circumstances, was a prime example of the government's paranoia of successful Muslims. With Hagos' father, who owned 50% of the soap factory, now deceased, Mohammed thought the government would soon take over the factory.

¶2. (C) Mohammed also said Deputy Mufti Salem Ibrahim is deathly afraid of the Saudi presence in Eritrea, believing that it intends to corrupt the Eritrean Muslim community. As a result, Mohammed explained, the Mufti's office has taken charge of all aspects of Muslim life in Eritrea, including schools and community programs. He said three of the 60 Muslims recently arrested have been local employees at the Embassy of Saudi Arabia.  
MCMULLEN